RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF SUB-CONSCIOUS PROCESS.

Perhaps the most striking feature in the recent development of Psychology, and more especially in that branch of it which is known as psychical research, is the tendency to break up the unity of consciousness into a plurality of distinct personalities. "I am told," said Professor Clarke Maxwell, "that I shall have soon to believe myself to be a congeries of plastidule souls"; and some at least of those who have taken up the study of mental phenomena seem now to have accepted that belief unreservedly. Upon others who cannot reconcile this view with their own immediate experience the language used—say, for example, in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*—has an effect of bewilderment which it is difficult to shake off, and which tends, I think, to throw confusion rather than enlightenment over the whole subject. In trying to point out some of the difficulties which oppress a reader of this latter class, my object is rather to give them shape and definiteness than to attempt a solution.

The keynote to the whole theory may be found in the use of such terms as "double" or "duplex personality," "multiplex personality," "*das Doppel-Ich*," and so on. It does not appear that as yet there is any generally accepted terminology, and so far as I can gather in the absence of definitions the meaning of "personality" is apt to vary with the nature of the phenomena in which the writer happens at the time to be interested.

As generally used it appears to be identical with a "chain of memory"; and again it is implied, if not assumed, that a "primary," "secondary," or "subadjacent" consciousness is equivalent to a distinct and independent personality. Now it is by no means obvious that consciousness, especially when subadjacent, involves a chain of memory, and it is difficult to proceed any further in our study until some more definite meaning has been attached to the word.

If, however, we determine to ignore this difficulty for the present, we seem to find three different forms of the theory, nowhere distinctly differentiated, but developing themselves more or less gradually. In the first place, there is the form which results from the assumption of what we may call different "layers" of consciousness. Here the personalities exist contemporaneously, and we may again distinguish them according as they are known only as the supposititious accompaniments of physical events or manifest themselves in genuinely psychical phenomena. The former personalities, under the title of unconscious mental processes, have gone far towards establishing their claim to be regarded as necessary and scientific hypotheses.

The third form of the theory appears where we have *successively* independent trains of memory, where the break between one personality and another might be represented as a break in

a straight line, rather than as a distinction between different planes. If we examine this form first we are at once confronted with difficulties.

In the first place, if the different chains of memory are to constitute different personalities it must, I suppose, be assumed that they are wholly different; that the break is complete. But such a break as this would appear to be not only not forthcoming, but from the nature of it inconceivable and—if we may use the term—"unknowable". Subjectively it obviously could not be known, since the recognition of difference implies a unity of consciousness, including and transcending the difference. A *subjective* break in consciousness is a contradiction in terms. On the other hand, to suppose that such a break could be known by the experimenting observer—or at least that it *has* been known in any of the instances cited—seems to point to a defective psychological analysis. To make this evident it is necessary to examine briefly the main "elements" in consciousness at any time. Roughly speaking, and for our present purpose, we may distinguish three factors which are never separated. There is what is known as the "organic sensation" or *cœnæsthesia*, which is largely coloured with "feeling" and so exercises a great influence on the play of our ideas; there is in especial prominence all that group of presentations—sensations and ideas—which constitute the present as distinct from the past and future; and, finally, there is "complicated" with these and endowing them with all that they possess of meaning and reality, an immense mass of sub-conscious but most important memories. Using the term sub-conscious in the sense of "undiscriminated parts of a discriminated whole," it would hardly be too much to say that these sub-conscious memories form the larger, if not the chief part, of consciousness at any moment; and so far as evidence goes to show this section—or rather aspect—of consciousness remains to a large extent untouched throughout the phenomena of hypnotism and so-called duplex personality. It is the memory of association only which breaks down; that of complication survives. Objects continue to be recognised as such, and even to be known by their names; and the nature of space and distance has not to be re-learned when the second "personality" comes into being. Presumably this is because in this sort of connexion memory has become to a large extent involuntary, *i.e.*, independent of feeling, whilst the play of ideas through ordinary "associations" is largely determined by pleasure and pain. Hence the intimate connexion between the fully conscious memory train, and the sub-conscious "organic sensation" which enables the experimenter by influencing the latter to give a different direction to the flow of the former. These three elements are all involved in the true psychological personality, and so far as identity of personality depends upon connexion with the past (we avoid here any reference to the logical and metaphysical *Ego*, in face of which a difference

of personalities becomes an absurdity), it is that part of the sub-conscious undiscriminated element which is neither accompanied nor influenced by feeling to any appreciable extent which constitutes the most important factor.

It may be urged that a difference in personality does not involve any such complete break as I have here assumed; that identity is sufficiently destroyed if the fully conscious memory train is disconnected to such an extent that the Subject in one state *cannot* recall the train peculiar to the other state; so that to all intents and purposes he leads two lives. Here again we are, I think, misled by an unpsychological attitude. In the first place for the psychological subject "*cannot*" and "*does not*" do not differ in meaning, and this because of the essential unity of consciousness which will not permit that more than one train of thought can at any moment be in *full* consciousness. Hence the proper expression would seem to be not that the Subject cannot pass from one series of ideas to another, but that the one series does not naturally lead to the other. But this is no more than can be said of the most ordinary undivided person, in his most ordinary states of mind. Whenever attention is concentrated on any one chain of memory there are many others excluded for the time being, and in an excitable nature nervous emotion may exclude—or "*inhibit*"—any chain of memory, properly so called. Every one but an infant or an idiot has many such chains, from which he is completely shut out at certain times. There is the chain of memory constituting the multiplication table, or a piece of poetry; if I were to attempt to recite these in public they would be as entirely blocked out or flooded by a wave of excitement as if I had been hypnotised; but it could not be said, except in a metaphorical sense, that I was another personality—I mean, that another personality would have taken possession of my (or its) body. Plentiful illustrations of the phenomenon may be found in the annals of the Salvation Army, and the process of giving a new direction to a man's thoughts and therefore his inclinations bids fair to become an important factor in religious and moral education, but the interest of the work would vanish—from a moral point of view—if the original and presumably bad personality were not "*regenerated*" but merely superseded.

Is there, moreover, anything to be gained by this arbitrary division of Selves? are we not tempted by it to exaggerate what are no doubt very striking deviations from the ordinary course of mental development, and to close our eyes to the fundamental unity underlying such deviations—perhaps all the more easily because it is so fundamental. And, further, do not the facts of hypnotic suggestion themselves tend to show how close the connexion really is between the groups of ideas which have been thus elevated into "*personalities*"?

Passing now to those forms of the theory in which the personalities appear as contemporaneous the confusion appears to be due

not so much to wrongness or incompleteness of method, as to a perverted use of language. If we once allow ourselves to apply the terms memory and mental to facts (?) which are not remembered and not known we cannot refuse to go further and allow that "every cell in our body may have a separate memory, and therefore in a sense a personality of its own". Put into physical terms this may be true enough; I suppose that every physical—or physiological—impression leaves its mark, and perhaps a tendency to its own reproduction, and if one cell receives an impression which is not shared in by its neighbouring cells it is so far differentiated from them; but does this constitute a personality? It is the so-called automatic actions which yield the ground for this form of the theory; if the body carries out a series of systematic actions while the mind is occupied with thoughts having no reference to that series it is assumed that there must be a secondary consciousness to which the series is present and by which it is controlled. It is assumed, that is, that every physical change in the body must have its psychical counterpart somewhere. If this be allowed there seems no reason why we should not carry the assumption further and assume a psychical counterpart (and consequent personalities) to the action of the radiometer in the sunshine, and the growing seed. But is it not possible—and if possible preferable in the present stage of psychology—to avoid such far-reaching hypothesis by giving a purely physical interpretation to the phenomena of automatic action? A physical or chemical stimulus on the eye produces a physical reaction in the finger for which repeated impressions have prepared the way, and we have automatic piano-playing.

It is different with the hypothesis of "unconscious mental processes". These are assumed, not as the concomitants of a physical series, but as the antecedents of true psychical facts; and the reason for assuming them lies in the prior assumption that otherwise those facts would be without (psychical) antecedents, would, that is, be effects without causes. I venture to call this an assumption because I do not think it is yet clear that a sufficient psychological analysis might not in every instance find an antecedent in the consciousness proper—that is, in the "primary" stream of consciousness as maintained by its background of sub-conscious memories.

What is meant by "unconscious mental processes"? It will be allowed, I think, that the process as such, the act of passing from one idea to another, is rarely, if ever, a matter for consciousness. The meaning seems to be that there is an interaction between ideas which are not present to any consciousness (but which might conceivably be so were not attention preoccupied), and that this interaction both starts from and results in an idea which is present to consciousness, and which is moreover disconnected with, irrelevant to, the contents which it finds in con-

sciousness on its appearance. I think a fair example of the kind of instance in which this explanation is used (and one which is often cited) is what happens when an idea is sought for in vain, and comes later unsought, and to all appearance unaccountably. Here the explanatory hypothesis involves not only the unconscious series connecting the two conscious points, it involves also a purposive direction of the series towards the desired object, a tentative process of rejecting all members of the series until the right one occurs, and reserving that one for elevation into consciousness. This is a large assumption to make except under strong pressure, and I should like to analyse such an instance more closely, in the hope of finding some more acceptable explanation.

Suppose what often happens, that I am looking for a word which persistently evades me; there is my sentence before me, incomplete, leading up to a word which will not present itself. "The sequences of logic are necessary, those of ordinary thought merely . . ." merely what? Accidental?—no, that does not fit, the word I want begins with "C". Coincidental?—no, that is at once rejected as nonsense. Contingent?—no, that seems to fall into place, but there is an absence of meaning about it which makes me suspect it of being an impostor. I give it up, and leave a blank. An hour afterwards I am tidying my book-shelf and thinking of domestic matters as I put Glen's *Poor Law Orders* in its place: Casual! that is the word I want. Am I to suppose an unconscious mental process, a second self, or dæmonic secretary at work underground and telephoning the word up just when he happens to find it, quite irrespective of my present needs and occupation, or even a purely mechanical interaction of ideas which happens to come to an end just here? Not at all; the *Poor Law* covers a very large group of ideas in my mind, amongst which the casual word is constantly coming to the fore. What has taken place is something like this: I have been trying to use a word in an unfamiliar connexion, it happens that in that connexion there are several other words expressing nearly the same meaning and more commonly used; they have blocked the way, caught the "search light" and reflected it back before it reached its destination. But they have also been rejected and the sentence remains unfinished. Now there is nothing which lingers in memory so long as an unfinished sentence, or an unanswered question; and naturally. For ten minutes or more I have been thinking of it and repeating it and puzzling over it; the thought is there all but a minute portion, that portion being the difference in meaning between accidental and casual; attention has been working round that meaning, lighting upon now this fraction of it, now that; it only needs the word for the whole to flash out with peculiar brilliancy in proportion to the amount of labour already expended. Suddenly a more familiar connexion is started, and it is there. Now note

another significant fact. I am at first puzzled by the importance the word assumes for me; why has it thrown itself at me like this? did I want it for anything? My seeking attitude is resumed, I remember my previous search, and the word falls into its proper place in the sentence. But the process is the reverse of that which would have taken place if the word had been the result of my original search (or of an "unconscious mental process"); *then* I was looking for an *x* to supply a want, now I *am* puzzled by an item of thought disproportionate (*not* irrelevant) to its context. We have seen the source of the peculiar emphasis attaching to the idea; it is due to the fact of attention having been concentrated so recently upon almost coincident ideas; *abx* was the idea wanted, and I have been dwelling upon *abc*, *bxd* and *axc*. Briefly, my recent efforts have lent peculiar force to the greater part of the idea, and when chance brings it within the focus of attention, this peculiar brilliancy re-attracts attention, and curiosity is set to work until it falls into place.

May not some such accidental association account for all apparent instances of unconscious mental processes? We cannot always trace the connexion, the association (the very interest attaching to our unexpected success in the instance above noted tends to obliterate the circumstances which gave rise to it and were in themselves almost without interest); but still less can we assume that it is not there, that an idea has found its way into a series which has in no way led up to it. *That* would be the true breach of continuity, which no hypothesis of unconscious mental processes could bridge over.

To sum up: to the student who has not accustomed himself to the idea, the breaking up of the Self into independent Egos—whether these be contemporaneous or successive—seems on the one hand to contradict the facts of psychical experience, on the other hand to be not yet essential even as a working hypothesis. Would it not be possible to place the whole subject in a clearer light by adopting some common standard of personality and by respecting the prejudice in favour of unity of consciousness until its contradiction becomes inevitable?

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